

Results of the Town Meeting Family Childcare Study Committee Survey

Comments and Findings are indicated in boldface.

Our committee, the Town Meeting Family Childcare Study Committee (TMFCSC), has been asked to look into ways to increase the diversity of Town Meeting membership. Specifically, while many of us are older/retired citizens, younger people and especially families with young children are under-represented in Town Meeting. We have been asked to investigate if there are ways that we can make it easier (possible) for these families to participate as TM members by helping with childcare. Please help our exploring this issue by answering the following questions. Use the back of this paper to elaborate your responses.

Leave your completed questionnaire in the designated box at the back of the auditorium.

General Comment:

43 or 20% of TM members responded to our Questionnaire. 218 is the total number of serving TM members, not including those who serve ex-officio. Some TM members due to illness or other personal reasons have not been attending TM. I believe only one ex-officio member responded and have kept that response separate from the tabulations. One problem is how to think of the nonresponders. If we assume that they all were not interested in providing any support for families with children to become part of Town Meeting, then the number in favor drops to only 14% (question 4), down from 79% of those who did respond. On the other hand, this may not be correct, since eight responders (5%) of those who did fill out a questionnaire indicated that they did not think support should be offered.

Questions:

1. If you have children, please list their ages.

Finding: only 4.5% of those who answered have younger than teen children.

- a. No Children -- 5 (3%)
- b. Adults -- 19 (51%)
- c. Teens--4 (2%)
- d. Middle school -- 2 (1%)
- e. Elementary -- 6 (3%)
- f. Pre-school -- 1 (.5%)
- g. Left Blank -- 5

2. How old were your children when you first became a Town Meeting member?

Findings: Only 17% of those TM members with children put off running for TM until their children were grown; but 29% of the responders had either adult children or no children to care for when they first ran for TM. 64% became TM members before their children were teens or even in Middle School.

- a. No Children -- 6
- b. Adult, grown -- 5 (17%)
- c. Teenage -- 6 (20%)
- d. Middle school -- 0
- e. Elementary -- 11 (37%)
- f. Pre-school -- 8 (27%)
- g. Left blank -- 5

3. How did you handle the responsibilities for the children and coming to TM?

Findings: Only about 23 (74%) of responders who had children to care for when they were in TM answered this question. 65% relied on the other parent

for childcare. 22% used non-spouse babysitters.

- a. Spouse cared for them -- 15 (65%)
- b. Served only one term because of childcare -- 2
- c. Babysitters -- 3
- d. Friends, extended family -- 2
- e. Left alone (teen) -- 1

4. Do you think that TM should offer some financial or other help to younger families in order that they might become TM members? Or do you agree more with the sentiment, "Perhaps it is appropriate that TM be mostly elders who have the time for community responsibilities. Families with young children are represented in town affairs by elections where issues about children effect how citizens vote for the select board and the school committee?"

Finding: 79% felt TM should offer help.

- a. Offer help 27 -- (69%)
- b. Do not offer help -- 6
- c. The problem is inevitable, therefore, don't help -- 2
- d. The problem is inevitable, help probably won't work but offer it -- 4

5. What is your opinion of the following ideas as possible town support for TM families with children? Rate the suggestion from 0, "a definite no" to 3, "a terrific suggestion". Feel free to included comments.

- a. A supervised study-recreational service at the Middle school, which would provide child supervision near to where TM was meeting.

Findings: 62.5% were in favor of this idea. Many of those opposed commented that the hour was too late to be helpful for most families that children needed to be in bed before the end of TM sessions.

- i. Yes #3 -- 17 (42.5%)
- ii. Yes #2 -- 8 (20%)
- iii. No --15 (note all were rated "0", none were "1 ") (37.5%)

- b. A stipend of \$20 per each meeting to pay for childcare (in fairness such support would be offered to others with family responsibilities, i.e. the care of a chronically sick family member).

Finding: 45% (18 of 40 responders) thought it was a good solution.

More thought it was not, or only minimally positive.

- i. No, indicated "0"—15 (37.5%)
- ii. Indicated "1" which seems too lukewarm to consider yes, --7 (17.5%)
- iii. Yes, "2"—6 (15%)
- iv. Yes, "3"—12 (30%)

- c. A roster of teens who had passed the childcare course at the high school who had indicated their willingness to provide childcare in the home of TM members with young children.

Findings: 80% were in favor either with a "2" or "3" response; 56% indicated a "3". This was the highest positive response.

- i. No, indicated by "0" -- 4
- ii. Indicated "1" which seems too lukewarm to consider yes, --1
- iii. Yes, "2" -- 10 (24%)
- iv. Yes, "3" -- 23 (56%)

- v. 2 question marks, 1 blank
 - d. A similar plan involving UMass, Amherst, or Hampshire students-**Findings: Similar to a high school roster to help families find reliable babysitters but somewhat less supported. In favor of the idea was 66.7% One person noted that college students are busier than high school students and might be less available related to the college calendar (exams, holidays).**
 - e.
 - i. No, indicated by "0" – 6
 - ii. A score of "1" --3
 - iii. Yes, "2" – 9 (21%)
 - iv. Yes, "3" – 19 (45%)
 - v. 4 question marks, 1 blank
6. Would it be reasonable to allow parents to run for a single TM seat as a couple in order that family needs could have a priority and still allow the fulfilling of TM responsibility?
Finding: Slightly more than half, 52.5% were in favor of this. This question drew the most passion. Positive responses included :“I would love this”!, “I like ideas that are out of the box”, “Absolutely, single parent families matter too”. Negatives included: “Terrible idea”, “It assumes that voters are interchangeable”. “Such an idea is an insult”.
- a. Yes, “3” –17 (42.5%)
 - b. Yes, “2” –4 (10%)
 - c. No, “0” – 17
 - d. Indicated “1” which is tabulated with the no –2
 - e. Blank – 1
- 6A. What about any pair being a TM member as a unit, for example, two neighbors who both are single parents? We realize that this suggestion would require a legal waiver from the state legislature and may not be legally possible. **Findings: A switch to No as the majority from question 6, 56.5%. There were those who were enthusiastic but many felt it ruined the concept of representation at TM.**
- a. No, “0” – 23 (56%)
 - b. Indicated “1” which is tabulated with the no – 2(0.5%)
 - c. Yes, “3” – 11 (27%)
 - d. Yes, “2” – 5 (12%)
 - e. Blank -- 1

Do you think these suggestions (question 6) are just too far out i.e. it would this lead to chaos in TM and be undemocratic in the sense of TM as representative. **This question was not answered by many responders and results not tabulated.**

Gender: **Women responders 22 (56%), Men responders 17, three did not indicate their gender.**

Are you a single parent? **15 (36.5%) are or were single parents when they first were TM members; 26 were always married when serving as a TM member; 2 did not indicate their marital state.**